

VZCZCXRO7555

OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV

DE RUEHEG #1009 1401326

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

O 191326Z MAY 08

FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9280

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 001009

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/19/2018

TAGS: PREL PARM PTER LE EG

SUBJECT: FM ABOUL GHEIT, S/I SATTERFIELD DISCUSS LEBANESE CRISIS

REF: STATE 49259

Classified By: DCM Stuart Jones for reason 1.4 (b).

¶1. (C) Summary: On the morning of May 11, Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit lamented to Ambassador Satterfield and the Ambassador that the Arab League (AL) would not be united at the May 11 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Cairo to discuss the Lebanese crisis. The Foreign Minister said that although Hizballah had displayed its military strength to Lebanon, the region and the world, it had sullied its reputation by behaving like a "bunch of thugs." Aboul Gheit said that diplomacy would be needed to restore Lebanon's balance and then to work toward implementing the AL Initiative.

Ambassador Satterfield and the Ambassador urged a strong Arab position at the AL Ministerial in support of the Lebanese Government, and against Hizballah and its Iranian and Syrian backers. End summary.

¶2. (C) Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit told Ambassador Satterfield and the Ambassador that Hizballah had occupied Beirut like a "bunch of thugs." The FM condemned Hizballah's firing at buildings, burning media organizations and deploying masked gunmen to overrun the streets of Beirut. He said that Egypt and the Arab League would need to use diplomacy to restore the political balance that had been lost in the previous days. Aboul Gheit said that Egypt and the Arab League would need to show the world that Hizballah's actions are illegal, and then would need to force Hizballah to withdraw from the positions it had occupied in Beirut. Once the balance was restored, he said, there would be space to work toward implementing the Arab League Initiative. Drawing on reftel points, Ambassador Satterfield and the Ambassador urged Aboul Gheit to marshal strong Arab backing to push back against Syria and support the GOL at the AL Ministerial.

¶3. (C) Aboul Gheit said that it would be difficult for Egypt and Saudi Arabia to effectively pressure Syria at the AL Ministerial because Syria carries the banner of its continuing conflict with Israel and, accordingly, is able to rally Arab support. Aboul Gheit speculated on introducing the idea of an Arab peacekeeping force for Lebanon at the Arab League Ministerial later that day, but then noted that he would not move forward with such a proposal immediately because of expected opposition from Syria, Qatar and Oman. Aboul Gheit asked for the U.S. to keep a low profile on the Arab League discussions on Lebanon so that Hizballah will not have a pretext to say, "The U.S. is supporting the traitors."

He also requested U.S. financing for a possible Arab peacekeeping force for Lebanon, and asked that the U.S. encourage Omani FM Yusef bin Allawi not to oppose such a force.

¶4. (C) In response to Ambassador Satterfield's comment that Oman may be acting out of a fear of Iran, Aboul Gheit said that Iran appears "invincible," but in fact has "all the defects" of Middle Eastern powers. As an example of a flawed Middle Eastern power, he cited Syria and its failure to

prevent Israel from destroying its nuclear facility. Iran, he said, is looking for an event to establish its "invincibility." Aboul Gheit mused that Iran "reminds me" of Egypt in the mid-1960's. However, he said that Egypt has more realistic goals now, such as development and providing food and medical care for its people.

¶5. (U) Ambassador Satterfield cleared this message.
SCOBET